

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 472 839

EA 032 109

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TITLE Class-Size Reduction: Using What's Been Learned To Inform Educational Decisions. The Informed Educator Series.
INSTITUTION Educational Research Service, Arlington, VA.
PUB DATE 2002-00-00
NOTE 12p.
AVAILABLE FROM Educational Research Service, 2000 Clarendon Blvd., Arlington, VA 22201 (Stock no. 0474: Non-Subscribers, \$9.60; Comprehensive Subscribers, \$4.80; Individual Subscribers, \$7.20). Tel: 703-243-2100; Tel: 800-791-9308 (Toll Free); Fax: 703-243-1985; Fax: 800-791-9309 (Toll Free); e-mail: msic@ers.org; Web site: <http://www.ers.org>.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE Document Not Available From EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Size; *Decision Making; Elementary Secondary Education; Information Utilization; Program Costs; Program Effectiveness; Program Implementation; *Small Classes

ABSTRACT

Class-size reduction (CSR) has been a complex and contentious issue for the last quarter century. Although the small-class concept was adopted because it appealed to common sense, research over time has revealed a mix of confounding variables, instead of a definitive conclusion. Some CSR efforts, such as Tennessee's Project STAR and Wisconsin's SAGE Program, showed benefits including achievement gains, especially among poor and minority students; greater individual attention and teacher knowledge of individual student progress; fewer classroom discipline disruptions; faster and more in-depth coverage of content; more student-centered classroom strategies, such as special-interest learning centers; greater teacher-parent contact and parent satisfaction; and reduced classroom stress and greater enjoyment of teaching. Cost works against CSR because of increased numbers of classes and teachers, and therefore salaries, and equipment and operating costs. Districts considering introducing CSR should ask themselves whether it is worth the effort and cost, and what conditions are necessary for positive outcomes to be realized. An alternative to CSR is the deployment of existing school staff for part or all of the school day to create smaller sizes for classes, such as early reading instruction. (Contains 33 references.) (RT)

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